A demon from ancient Khmer, a man who never drank: both had their reasons for existence, their dark assignments.

Two More Tales for the Horrid at Heart

By BRAD STEIGER

SACRIFICE PLAY

NO, Harkins didn't make it back from Cambodia, poor bloke. What happened to him? Well, that would take longer to tell than I have whiskey left.

Really, Sir Sidney, I wasn't hinting for you to buy a round, but if you insist. . . .

Now then, you remember what old Harkins was like in school, don't you? A congenital blunderer. Oh, certainly he worked hard enough to get by, but he never really had what it takes to excell. You remember, don't you, how he used to botch translations? Greek, Latin, Sanscrit . . . no matter. Always he would miss some minute point that would throw his translation off. And no need to mention his blunders on the rugby field . . . they were legion.

At any rate, Harkins and I were always chums in school and this would have been our third successful archeological expedition to Angkor Wat. You may remember the many strange things that we had unearthed on our previous expedition. It was our theory that a vanished race other than the Khmers were responsible for the architectural and engineering feats of Angkor. We also had substantial reason to believe that this mysterious civilization had a priesthood possessed of many great powers.

I was examining one of the demon guardians at Thom's Gate of Victory when I heard Harkins calling me from within one of the minor temples. I knew he had been working on the translation of a script we had found etched on the bottom of a rather obscene looking idol, and from the excited tone of his voice, I assumed that

he thought he had deciphered the message.

He was standing before the altar with a smug grin of accomplishment stretching his pudgy features. I hoped that he'd made an accurate translation for a change because I'd destroyed too many of his big moments in the past six years.

"Peters," he said as he led me by the arm to the altar, "I want you to stand right here and not say a word."

I obliged, though I was a bit impatient with his sudden flair for the dramatic. I wanted to get back to my demon at Thom's Gate.

MY impatience soon turned to consternation when Harkins uttered a few words in the ancient Khmer dialect and I found myself unable to move a muscle.

"It works!" he shouted like Edison must have when the first light bulb sputtered into life. "I've discovered how the ancients were able to finance the building of their great city."

I wanted to scream questions at Harkins, but I was completely paralyzed. I was not to be kept in the dark for long, however. He was soon waving his notes in my face.

"This is an incantation to a demon who granted the ancients precious stones in return for a human sacrifice. I'm about to become wealthy; and you, Peters, are about to become a sacrifice."

It was incredible. Not that Harkins was about to sacrifice me. I had, of course, long known that the man resented my superior skills. But that Harkins had actually been able to pull this thing off all by himself.

Somehow I still couldn't believe that he had actually managed an accurate translation. But as the incantation grew in frenzy and fervor and the vague, swirling mist above the altar became a hideous creature of darkness bearing precious stones, it certainly seemed as though Harkins had scored.

"Here," Harkins said in a hoarse whisper, spreading his arms wide. "Here is your priest and here is your sacrifice."

The black demon nodded his huge head; his red eyes widened greedily. He placed his armload of precious stones on the altar, then threw himself hungrily on Harkins.

Several moments passed before I was able to move. It seemed all a dream except that Harkins had vanished without a trace and on the altar rested the sparkling gems. My reason demanded an explanation and sought out the notes that Harkins had dropped as the demon seized him.

Yes, old Harkins never could translate. Greek, Latin, Sanscrit, Khmerian . . . no matter. As al-

ways he had missed some minute point that had thrown his transla tion off. You see, it was the *sacrifice* who was to do the chanting —not the priest.

ONE TOO MANY

WHAT'S so funny about my back?" Stella Brondyke asked her husband. "Stop giggling and finish zipping my dress."

Warren resumed zipping. "I'm thinking about the party tonight, Stel. I'm finally going to get Ron to take a drink. After two years I'm finally going to get Ronald Martin plastered."

"Oh, Warren," Stella mumbled as her lipstick looped her puckered lips. "Every party you give Ron the needle about not drinking. You're becoming a boor. You can't talk him into it, so why don't you give up?"

"Give up?" Warren echoed as he struggled with his bow tie. "Give up when the perfect gimmick has finally occurred to me?"

"And what's that?" Stella asked, hating to admit she was interested.

"Well, it's so simple I don't know why it didn't occur to me before. Usually I try to talk him into a cocktail or a bourbon on the rocks, but he always refuses and you fix him Hawaiian punch. Fine. Tonight you put *vodka* in his punch."

"Warren!" Stella protested.

"Odorless, tasteless vodka," Warren chuckled. "Old Ron will be stoned before he knows it."

"But Warren"—Stella was great on details—"What if Ron is under doctor's orders *not* to drink. What if he used to be a wino or something and he's been on the wagon for years and then you . . ."

"Aw, he's just one of these pompous, stuffed-shirt types," Warren assured his wife. "I mean, I like the guy and all, but he should learn to unbend. I'll be doing him a real favor."

"Well, all right," Stella sighed, her conscience pinned to the mat by her husband's persuasiveness. "I'll go along with the gag." She snickered, visualizing a tipsy Ronald Martin. "I bet Ron will be a riot when he gets some booze in him."

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The Brondyke's party list included their usual crowd of split-level sophisticates and seemed to be the usual noisy cigarette-fogged, liquor-flowing success that their parties always were. Warren noted with satisfaction that Ron had already had three vodka-spiked Hawaiian punches by eleven o'clock.

Warren didn't really know too much about him. He was a bachelor, yet owned his own home here in suburbia. Although they rode the same commuter train, Warren had never been able to pin

him down as to what line of work he was in. But he was, in spite of his stuffiness, congenial and well-liked by the Brondyke's friends.

"How's it going, Ron?" Warren asked. "Can I fix you a whiskey sour?"

Ron laughed. "You never give up, do you Warren?"

"Just want to introduce you to the finer things in life, my boy," Warren said.

"I know what the liner fings in life, er, the finer things in life are," Ron said raising his glass in salute. "And liquor is not one of them!"

The vodka had begun taking effect, Warren noted with a warm glow of personal accomplishment. To a man unused to alcohol those three shots would be mighty potent.

"How about some more punch, then?" Warren asked, signaling Stella for a refill for Ron's glass.

"Fine," Ron agreed, readily. "This is excellent punch."

Warren's capacity for alcohol was generally recognized as bordering on the legendary, but he could have sworn that Ron's nose was growing longer. He blinked his eyes twice, then widened them as Ron's skin began taking on a greenish tint.

"Skoal!" Ron said, raising his glass of spiked punch aloft. His arm stretched up to the ceiling and shattered the glass against a light fixture. Women squealed as bits of glass and droplets of punch showered them, then screamed as they saw a green Ronald Martin standing there with a serpentine arm seven feet long.

"Fool!" Martin snarled and his mouth was no longer a mouth, but a hair-lined aperture from which slithered a purple tongue. "You put alcohol in my punch. It's depressed my nerve center and destroyed my hypno-screen!"

Warren and Stella Brondyke and all their guests stood rooted to the spot as they watched the facade of Ronald Martin disintegrate into a shapeless mound of green slime. When, at last, panic seized them, it was too late.

THE END

BAZAAR OF THE BIZZARRE

(*Continued from page 29*)

For a moment there was a shimmer traveling upward and through it he seemed to glimpse distortedly, as through thick glass, a black face with a cobwebby skin that entirely covered mouth and nostrils and eyes.

Then that dubious flash was gone and there were only two cowled heads peering down at him from over the wall top. There was chuckling laughter.

Then both cowled heads drew back out of sight and there was only the edge of the roof and the sky and the stars and the blank wall.

THE END